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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 03/21/08

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Articles:

1) U.S. sailor likely involved in Yokosuka murder

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top play) (Full)
March 21, 2008

A U.S. serviceman stationed at the U.S. Navy's Yokosuka base is suspected of being involved in a recent Yokosuka murder case, according to what was revealed yesterday by U.S. military sources to Japanese investigative authorities. In the murder case, Masaaki Takahashi, a 61-year-old taxi driver, was found stabbed to death on the night of Mar. 19 in the city of Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. Kanagawa prefectural police have also secured similar information. The local police are carefully investigating the incident. At the same time, the police have requested the U.S. military to cooperate with local investigative authorities.

According to U.S. Navy sources, goods believed to belong to a Yokosuka-based U.S. serviceman were found in the taxi.

The U.S. serviceman, assigned to a Yokosuka-based ship of the U.S.

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Navy, did not return to the base when the ship left port, according to the sources. His whereabouts are still unknown, the sources said. The U.S. military is hurrying to find out his whereabouts and provided such information to Japanese investigative authorities.

According to police investigations, Takahashi was found bleeding on the driver's seat of a taxi parked on a street in Yokosuka City's Shioiricho at around 9:20 p.m. Mar. 19. In his neck was a 20-centimeter kitchen knife. The police had an autopsy performed on the body. As a result, the police discovered that Takahashi died from blood loss resulting from damage to the thoracic aorta. In the taxi was money amounting to more than 60 thousand yen believed to be from passengers. Cash in his suit was also left as is.

The prefectural police suspect that Takahashi was stabbed possibly by the last passenger he picked up that day in Tokyo.

According to the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement, U.S. military personnel who commit crimes in Japan are to be held by the U.S. military before they are indicted if they are already under U.S. custody. In 1995, however, the SOFA's operation was improved. In the case of heinous crimes, Japan and the United States have agreed that the U.S. military will favorably consider Japanese requests for a pre-indictment transferal.

In January 2006, a Yokosuka-based U.S. sailor was arrested on suspicion of slaying a 56-year-old woman of Yokosuka City and taking her money. At that time, the U.S. government agreed to transfer the suspect on a charge of murder as the first case of turnover in the SOFA's improved application.

In August this year, the USS George Washington, a U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, will arrive at Yokosuka for deployment. The George Washington will be the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to be based at Yokosuka. However, the incident, if the missing U.S. serviceman is involved, will likely affect the flattop's Yokosuka deployment.

2) U.S. serviceman's credit card found in slain driver's taxi

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)

March 21, 2008

A man was found dead in a taxi in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture, on the night of March 19. The Kanagawa Prefectural Police, which is investigating this murder case, said yesterday that a credit card was found in the car. The cardholder is believed to be a U.S. serviceman stationed at the U.S. Navy's Yokosuka Naval Base near the scene of the murder. The prefectural police are searching for the serviceman to question him. The U.S. Naval Forces Japan also is searching for the man.

The prefectural police have begun searching for the man on a murder charge. The police yesterday announced that the man found dead in the taxi was the taxi driver Masaaki Takahashi (61), who lived at 1-chome, Higashi Shinagawa, Shinagawa Ward, Tokyo.

According to the police investigation, Takahashi was found slain in his parked taxi, whose engine was still operating, at a corner of a residential area at Shioiri Town, Yokosuka City, around 9:20 p.m. of March 19. His neck slit deep by a 20-centimeter kitchen knife, Takahashi lay strapped into the driver's seat, the police said.

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As a result of an autopsy, it was discovered that Takahashi died of blood loss because of stab wound on the thoracic aorta. Reportedly, the knife point reached the upper part of his lung. With no signs of a struggle in the car, the prefectural police assume that Takahashi sitting in the driver's seat was stabbed to death all of sudden. When Takahashi's body was found, the taxi meter was set at "payment" and the meter rate was 17,000 yen. Several tens of thousands of yen were discovered in Takahashi's jacket and trousers, and some sixty thousand yen, which seemed to be his proceeds, was found in a box beside the driver's seat.

Takahashi had worked for the Anzen Taxi Company's (at Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo) Shinagawa Office since 2000. According to a company staffer, Takahashi frequently waited for customers around Haneda Airport.

The prefectural police investigated the inside of the taxi and discovered a credit card. The police identified the cardholder as a U.S. serviceman assigned to the U.S. Yokosuka Naval Base. According to informed sources, the serviceman is a petty officer and a crew member of a cruiser deployed in the Yokosuka base. Reportedly, the serviceman did not board a cruiser that already left Yokosuka and has been missing for several weeks. The U.S. Forces Japan also is searching for the serviceman to question him.

The headquarters of the U.S. Naval Forces Japan yesterday responded to an interview with the Asahi and made this comment: "The U.S. Navy will cooperate in every possible way with the Japanese side."

3) Location of slain taxi driver near U.S. base on a street few people use and local residents fear to go out at night

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 31) (Excerpts)
March 21, 2008

A scream pierced the night on a rainy street in a residential area. The incident was the knife slaying of a taxi driver in an area close to Yokosuka Navy Base in the city of Yokosuka in Kanagawa Prefecture. Suspicion arose the next day that an American serviceman stationed at that base may have been involved, and things began to move. In January 2006, there was an incident in which a part-time female office worker (then 56) was robbed and killed by a sailor from that base. Fear then arose among the local residents.

A young woman (21) who lives close to the scene of the crime gave this direct account, with an expression of fear on her face: "I heard someone scream three times. When I looked out there was a taxi stopped outside my home, and I saw the male driver slumped over with his seat belt still on."

The scene of the crime is a residential street with few passers by. The taxi was parked in a dimly lit area with its lights out. According to the woman, the taxi meter light registered "payment,"

and the lights inside the cab were lit. A self-employed male (59), who is the woman's father, said: "The rain was heavy, so we did not notice cars passing by. Since it is not a street people use to pass through, we were surprised." The residential street where the crime took place is less than a kilometer away from Yokosuka Navy Base. The 2006 murder took place about 1.5 kilometers away from that street in a back street behind a busy commercial street. "We fear going out at night in this area, too," said the self-employed male.

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4) Okinawa police arrest U.S. servicemen's sons for taxi robbery

MAINICHI (Page 31) (Full)
March 21, 2008

Okinawa prefectural police announced on Mar. 18 that they had arrested the sons of Okinawa-based U.S. servicemen for taxi robbery.

One of the two arrested boys is a 15-year-old boy of a Marine, and where he lives is unknown. The other is an Air Force serviceman's son, 16, who is a high school student and lives at Yaeshima 1, Okinawa City. According to investigations, the two boys are suspected of stealing a cash box with about 5,400 yen near the driver's seat when exiting the taxi on a street in Okinawa City's Minamitobaru at around 10:15 p.m. Mar. 16.

5) 80 MOD officials to be disciplined: Ishiba to return part of his salary

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
March 21, 2008

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba will discipline a large number of Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) officers, including such senior key personnel as Vice MOD Minister Kohei Masuda and MSDF Chief of Staff Eiji Yoshikawa and other MSDF personnel over a series of blunders involving the MSDF, such as the Aegis destroyer's collision with a fishing boat. He has also firmed up his decision to announce that he will return part of his salary as defense minister to the national treasury. Senior Vice MOD Minister Akinori Eto and Parliamentary Secretaries Terada and Akimoto will also return part of their salaries.

Punitive actions in relation to the collision, the leak of key data on the Aegis vessel, and a fire on the escort ship Shirane will be released in a package. About 80 personnel will likely be punished. Yoshikawa will be transferred.

Regarding the collision, senior officers at the Maritime Staff Office and Self-Defense Fleet Headquarters, as well as Masuda and Yoshikawa, will be subject to punishment for the accident and follow-up measures, such as a delay in reporting to Ishiba.

Regarding the intelligence leak, an MSDF major had already been arrested and indicted on suspicion of violating the intelligence protection law under the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. More than 50 personnel will be punished.

Concerning the fire on the Shirane, it has been found that a combination refrigerator/warmer was brought into the Combat Information Center without permission. The captain will be punished for that.

6) Interim report on Aegis collision, which is to be released today, will not mention cause of collision

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
March 21, 2008

Ryuko Tadokoro

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The Ministry of Defense (MOD) will today release an interim report on the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) Aegis vessel Atago's collision, a report on the leakage of information about the Aegis system, and a report on a fire on the destroyer Shirane. The reports are expected to not mention the cause of the collision and the cause of the fire on the Shirane and instead conclude that the causes cannot be identified. By releasing the reports, the Fukuda administration, which is losing the grip on power as seen in such events as its failure to choose a new Bank of Japan governor before the deadline, wants to put an end somehow to a series of misconducts involving the MOD and dodge the opposition bloc's pursuit of the government's responsibility. However, criticism has already been voiced, even in the MOD, with one official arguing, "It is a slapdash approach to release the report without identifying the causes."

According to informed sources, the report on the Atago's collision will neither specify the cause of the collision nor the conclusion that the Atago was responsible for the collision. Because the lieutenant commander who was on duty when the Atago collided with a fishing boat and several other crewmembers also on duty at the time are under investigation by the Japan Coast Guard, MOD has yet to question them. So, the report will simply refer to testimonies obtained from others and the records obtained from equipment, such as the radar.

As for the cause of the fire on the Shirane, an internal survey concludes that there is a strong possibility that a device that can warm and cool, which is someone's personal belonging, was highly likely the cause of the fire, but the report will likely conclude that it is allowed to bring in personal belongings without obtaining permission but that the cause of the fire is unidentified. Regarding the leak of information about the Aegis system, the report, based on the findings already obtained from a joint investigation by the Kanagawa Prefectural Police and the MSDF's police, will come up with how information was leaked out and simply point out violations of internal rules.

By releasing the reports on three different cases, which occurred from last year to early this year, the MOD intends to hurriedly punish the concerned officers.

7) Ruling, opposition blocs in agreement on punishing simple possession of child pornography

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
March 21, 2008

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the New Komeito and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) are aiming at amending the Law Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and for Protecting Children for the purpose of stemming the spread of child pornography over the Internet. The LDP and the New Komeito will seek a ban on the simple possession of child pornography. The DPJ will also consider specific measures, setting up a taskforce next month.

Now that the ruling and opposition camps are in agreement on banning simple possession, moves to strengthen the regulation will likely accelerate.

The law was enacted in 1999, sponsored by lawmakers. However, a ban

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on simple possession of child pornography was not incorporated out of concern that it could escalate the range of investigative authority.

However, among G-8 nations, only Japan and Russia do not ban the simple possession of child pornography. According to an opinion poll the Cabinet Office conducted in September 2007, 90.8 PERCENT of respondents replied that the simple possession of child pornography should be regulated. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Schieffer also asked Justice Minister Kuno Hatoyama to toughen the regulation.

New Komeito in December last year established a project team to consider a revision of the law. The panel agreed to make simple possession of child pornography subject to penalty. The LDP also reached a unanimous decision to place a ban on simple possession at a meeting of a subcommittee set up this month. A majority of participants said that such an act should be made subject to punishment. The LDP and the New Komeito will aim at submitting a bill amending the law to the current Diet session.

The DPJ will hold the first meeting of the taskforce in early April. It will aim at reaching a consensus for amending the law, after studying the situation of child pornography and sorting out problems with the existing law.

8) Preparatory meeting for TICAD starts; Verification of assistance to Africa incorporated in Japan's draft declaration

ASAHI (Page 5) (Full)
March 21, 2008

Toru Tamagawa, Libreville

A ministerial-level preparatory meeting for the upcoming Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which Japan will host in Yokohama City in May, yesterday kicked off in Gabon's capital city of Libreville in West Africa. Japan unveiled for the first time a draft of a "Yokohama Declaration," guidelines for assistance to Africa, which Japan plans to adopt at the upcoming TICAD. According to an official involved, the draft mentions the need for the TICAD and the Group of Eight (G-8) Toyako Summit in Hokkaido in July to work together, as well as a system for verifying how assistance is implemented.

The two-day preparatory session is chaired either by Foreign Minister Koumura or Senior Vice Foreign Minister Onodera. In the session, details of the draft will be discussed. Onodera said in a speech: "We will steadily reflect the results of the ministerial-level meeting as well as the TICAD summit meeting slated for May in future talks on development of Africa."

The draft of the Yokohama Declaration mentions the need to accelerate economic growth through the construction of social infrastructure and the need to establish human security backed by peace and development. The draft also refers to climate change and calls on participants to support the "Cool Earth 50," a concept put up by the Japanese government.

Regarding Japan's policy of attaching importance to economic growth, critical views were voiced by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with one NGO member arguing: "It will only benefit the government and a portion of the wealthy people. It will not save a large number

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of Africans suffering from poverty."

9) Assistant Secretary of State Hill positive about resuming trilateral talks among Japan, U.S., ROK before next round of six-party talks

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
March 21, 2008

Washington

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, America's chief delegate to the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue, on March 19 met the press and indicated he hopes to resume trilateral talks among the chief negotiators in the six-party talks from Japan, the United States, and South Korea. Japan and South Korea are also positive about resuming such talks. Hill predicted: "The three countries' representatives will meet before the next round of the six-party talks."

10) Government paying close attention to Taiwan's presidential election

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
March 21, 2008

The Japanese government is now watching with mixed feelings how Taiwan's president election, which will take place tomorrow, will turn out. The government is paying close attention to it because speculation has been rife that depending on the results of the race, Taiwan might distance itself from Japan, while moving closer to China.

A dead heat is now being carried out between two candidates: Ma Ying-jeou of the opposition Nationalist Party, who advocates a policy of holding a dialogue with China, and Frank Hsieh of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, a former premier, who favors Taiwan's independence. The Japanese government's formal position is that Japan hopes that the stability of Taiwan Strait will be maintained, according to the Foreign Ministry.

From this viewpoint, for Japan, it is desirable that Ma will win the race. Although Hsieh is believed to be more moderate than incumbent President Chen Shui-bian, he sticks to his view that Taiwan should join the United Nations under the name of Taiwan.

However, Hsieh studied at Kyoto University and speaks Japanese. He is a Japan expert. When he visited Japan at the end of last year, he stressed: "Japan and the United States are most important friends of Taiwan. We need to come up with common defense goals and build a relationship with common interests."

Meanwhile, Ma studied at Harvard University and is a U.S. specialist. He has an historical view of the war that is close to that of China. He criticized visits to Yasukuni Shrine by then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. A source familiar with Japan-Taiwan relations said: "Ties between Taiwan and China and between Taiwan and the U.S. will be even closer," if Ma is elected. With this in mind, when Ma visited Japan last fall, he met with lawmakers from the ruling and opposition parties. He tried to erase his image of being anti-Japanese.

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Japan does not expect that the movement in Taiwan for becoming an independent state will accelerate. It also does not want to see close ties between Taiwan and China upset the balance in Japan's relations with China, the U.S., and Taiwan. Therefore, government officials intend to pay close attention to the movements of the new president.

11) Government agonizing over how to deal with Tibetan issue, finding it hard to take wait-and-see attitude toward human right issue; Incident could affect President Hu's Japan visit

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
March 21, 2008

The government is agonizing over how to respond to the series of riots in Tibet. It basically takes the view that the incident is China's internal problem. However, if the riots do not subside, China is bound to come under international criticism in connection with human rights violations. The matter could affect President Hu Jintao's Japan visit slated for early May.

The government asked Beijing to allow officials at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing to enter the area of the riot from the standpoint of protecting Japanese nationals. However, Beijing did not comply with the request, citing that the incident is a domestic issue. Foreign Minister Koumura made a statement criticizing China: "Although it is an internal problem, it is only natural for the international community to take interest in human rights issues. China should be more transparent about its own account, as well."

The U.S., which takes a harsh stance toward human rights issues, has indicated its concern over the situation. However, it is still watching how the situation will develop, according to a Foreign Ministry source. The EU is expected to discuss the possibility of boycotting the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games at a

foreign ministerial meeting later in the month. If the situation worsens, international opinion will likely stiffen at once.

The government by all means wants to avoid a situation in which Hu's visit takes place while the unrest in Tibet is continuing. If the government takes a tepid approach toward Hu at such a time, it could come under international criticism. On the other hand, if it takes a harsh stance, it could strain bilateral relations, as happened in the cases of the issue of gas-field development in the East China Sea and the tainted Chinese-made frozen gyoza dumpling incident.

For this reason, Foreign Minister Koumura intends to bring up this issue at a meeting with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who is scheduled to visit Japan in mid-April, and directly ask the Chinese government to peacefully resolve the situation in Tibet. However, with the Chinese side indicating no signs of softening its stance, Koumura revealed his distress, "With President Hu's Japan visit close at hand, to what extent Japan should toughen its stance is a difficult issue."

12) Ruling coalition members appear to be distancing selves from Prime Minister Fukuda, criticizing him for handling of BOJ chief appointment, willingness to compromise on highway tax revenues issue

KIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
March 21, 2008

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The cohesiveness of the government of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is starting to unravel. Some members of the government and ruling parties are now criticizing the prime minister for the way he handled the issue of selecting a candidate for the next governor of the Bank of Japan. Ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmakers with vested interest in road construction projects are now expressing distrust of Fukuda for his response to consultations on a revision of the government-drafted bills on highway tax revenues. If the trend of LDP members distancing themselves from Fukuda picks up speed, the political situation might become fluid at the end of this month when the provisional gasoline tax law will expire.

Yesterday morning, Yosano Kaoru, a former chief cabinet secretary, and Hidenao Nakagawa, a former LDP secretary general, called separately at the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei). They seemed to have exchanged views with Fukuda on such issues as the appointment of new BOJ governor and highway tax revenues.

After his meeting with the prime minister, asked by reporters about his view on the vacancy of the top seat at the central bank, Nakagawa tacitly criticized the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) response, saying: "The prime minister is taking the situation seriously. The situation is not the prime minister's responsibility."

It is the fact, though, that many in the government and ruling camp are pointing the finger of blame at the prime minister. The reason is that Fukuda after putting it off until March 18, finally picked as his candidate for the BOJ governorship Koji Tanami, who also had served in the Finance Ministry as did Toshiro Muto, whose nomination had been earlier rejected by the largest opposition party for that reason.

Gen Nakatani of the Tanigaki faction told the press on March 19: "He should have held prior consultations." In a meeting of the Ibuki faction, headed by Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki, views questioning Fukuda's handling of the matter were raised. A former cabinet minister said: "The prime minister cannot read the atmosphere."

SCHIEFFER